Middle Eastern Studies at IU

Bloomington’s Choksy wins Guggenheim Fellowship

Recent national rankings have placed IU Bloomington’s Near/Middle Eastern Studies among the top ten of its kind in the country. During the past year, the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (NELC) and the Middle Eastern Studies Program (MES) joined together into a single unit under the energetic leadership of Fedwa Malti-Douglas, Martha C. Kraft Professor of Humanities.

The department’s national visibility during the past year has been evident. The department was chosen by the Republic of Turkey to be the home of an endowed chair in Ottoman and Turkish Studies, and a faculty search is already under way.

Malti-Douglas’ recently published book, *Men, Women, and God(s): Nawal El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics*, was designated as a “Centennial Book” by the University of California Press. Internationally renowned scholar Suzanne Stetkevych, Ruth N. Halls Professor of NELC, was appointed editor-in-chief of the international *Journal of Arabic Literature*. And Jamsheed Choksy, assistant professor in NELC and adjunct faculty in the department of Central Eurasian Studies who joined IU in 1993, won a prestigious John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship for 1996-97.

Choksy’s project, “The Lives and Training of Present-Day Magi,” builds on his previous research on the subject, for which he has won recognition several times.

In 1994, he was awarded a PCIP grant from the Office of International Programs, followed by a grant-in-aid in 1995 from Research and the University Graduate School. That same year, the American Academy of Religion awarded Choksy an Individual Research Grant award for his work. In 1996, he was chosen for an Outstanding Junior Faculty Award.

Born and raised as a Zoroastrian, Choksy hopes his research will address the gap in knowledge of modern magi and Zoroastrianism. He points out that so much previous scholarship on the magi is confined to events that took place in Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

In contrast, Choksy will study the magi of the 1970s-1990s, whose lifestyles and occupations are being altered and threatened by contemporary socioeconomic factors. His investigation combines the analytical methodology of religious studies with the field-gathering techniques of anthropologists.

The magi, who once counted among the tens of thousands, now number around 3,000 active members and are mainly concentrated in Bombay, India, having moved there from Iran during the 18th century. They continue to serve as the chief religious authorities of Zoroastrianism, and the laity of Iran still travel to Bombay for training and guidance. However, their numbers are rapidly declining as younger generations choose not to enter the hereditary priesthood, opting instead for the professions of law, medicine, and en...
Thai Schools Renew Cooperative Links With IU’s School of Dentistry

Since the early 1990s, when the IU School of Dentistry and Thailand’s five dental schools signed educational agreements, the schools have been steadily building a bridge of friendship between Thailand and Indianapolis. Another plank was added to that bridge when IUSD renewed its commitment to Thailand during ceremonies held at the IU dental school August 15 when visitors representing Thai universities, and IU administrators, faculty, and staff gathered in the Gorman Center to witness the signing of a Letter of Agreement between D. Visaka Limwongse, director of the doctoral program at Chulalongkorn University, and Dr. George Stookey, acting dean of dentistry at IU.

The signing reaffirmed an interest in collaboration between the Ministry of University Affairs of Thailand and the IU School of Dentistry. The document, which will be valid for four years, will serve as an umbrella agreement for the five individual school contracts IUSD signed in 1993 and 1994 with Chulalongkorn, Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Mahidol, and Prince of Songkhla universities.

The primary goal of the signatories to the agreement is to promote the development of graduate dental education in Thailand.

A number of Thai students and faculty members have participated in educational opportunities at IU since the original school agreements were signed.

Through its Ministry of University Affairs, Thailand has sent doctoral students to dental schools at IU and other American universities for advanced training in key areas of dentistry. After completing their studies, the Thai students return home to train others.

Thailand hopes that this kind of exchange will ultimately ease the severe shortage of dental healthcare workers in some parts of this Southeast Asian country. Plans for the construction of three additional dental schools in Thailand is currently under way. — IU School of Dentistry

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gineering. Combined with other socioeconomic pressures, modern magic risk becoming extinct within a few generations, says Choksy.

Honors have also been won by NELC graduate students. In spring, Lijlana Bubonjic Elverskog was honored on Founders Day with a Lieber Memorial Teaching Associate Award for excellence in the teaching of Arabic. She is only one of eight people in the United States certified by the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages as a proficiency tester in Arabic. Elverskog’s research involves examining the theoretical and practical bases of Arabic language instruction, and working to reconcile the division between “classical” written language and “vernacular” spoken language.

Graduate student Heidi Ford, recipient of a U.S. Department of Education GAANN fellowship in 1994-95, was one of a select number of students chosen this past summer to study at the prestigious School of Criticism and Theory held at Dartmouth College.

Other students recognized for their studies are graduate Amalia Gossen and undergraduate Jonathan Miller, both recipients of this year’s Haddawi Awards for Excellence in Arabic. Awards for Excellence in Persian were given to graduate Akiko Motoyoshi and undergraduate Patrick Farris, through the generosity of two members of the Persian community in Indianapolis, Dr. Cyrus Behroozi and Dr. Hormoz Broumand.

In October, the Danesh Institute, an Indianapolis-based society that promotes social and behavioral sciences research on Iranian communities abroad, held its annual conference on the IUPUI campus. The conference theme was “Iranian Dual Identity: Implications for the First and Second Generations.” IUPUI participants included Cyrus Behroozi (Social Work), Richard Fredland (Political Science), Homayoon Shidnia (Medicine), Mohammad Kaviani (Economics), and Linda Walbridge (Anthropology/Sociology).

— RMN

IUPUI Chancellor Gerald Bepko (center right) holds the Letter of Agreement extending IU’s cooperative links with Thai schools of dentistry which was signed by Dr. Visaka Limwongse (center left) of Chulalongkorn University.